

VZCZCXRO9596
PP RUEHDE
DE RUEHYN #1832/01 1751315
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241315Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4425
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0152
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA PRIORITY 0573
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0614
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY 0489
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0155
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY 0345
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0147
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY 0001
RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0027
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001832

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/19/2016

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SUBJECT: SALEH ADVISES GEN ABIZAID ON SOMALIA'S "NEW TALIBAN"

REF: SANAA 1773

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR THOMAS C. KRAJESKI, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Saleh told visiting CENTCOM Commander GEN John Abizaid on June 18 that Yemen had invited members of the Somali Islamic Courts (IC) and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to Sanaa for talks. The IC leadership answered that they would come "within a week." Saleh said if they do not come to Sanaa, it would be a clear indicator that they intend on becoming the "New Taliban." He disclaimed rumors that Yemen was sending weapons to the TFG and said he believed Egypt and Libya were supporting the Courts in order to destabilize Ethiopia. Saleh pleaded for more help from coalition naval assets patrolling the Gulf of Aden in stopping boats filled with Somali refugees destined for the Yemeni coast. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Saleh opened a cordial meeting with GEN Abizaid with a discussion of the current situation in Iraq, but quickly turned to Somalia. Saleh opined that fears of an Ethiopian invasion were exaggerated. Addis Ababa is aware that the Islamic Courts would use any incursion as a pretext to rally the people against foreign intervention, which would only strengthen the hands of the Islamists. Responding to a question from GEN Abizaid, Saleh said even an Ethiopian raid, rather than a full invasion, might not weaken the Courts because the "Somali people are stubborn." The religious extremists within the Islamic Courts have a great deal of sympathy among Somalis, and even in Yemen, although it is more "hidden" here than in Somalia.

13. (C) The Islamic Courts represent a "New Taliban," Saleh advised, but if they learned the lessons of the Afghan regime, they will not be as confrontational with their neighbors and the west. In that regard, Saleh said his invitation to the Courts and the TFG to come to Sanaa for talks would be an important test of the Courts' intentions.

"They said they would come within a week," he explained, "but if they were sincere, they would have accepted much earlier."

Saleh said the Courts were likely just stalling for time in order to achieve more victories on the ground and then come to talks from a "position of strength" or even reject talks with the TFG altogether.

¶4. (C) Indirectly referencing recent media reports that Yemen had sent several planeloads of weapons to Baidoa destined for the TFG, Saleh said such rumors were not true, and were only drummed up by the Courts in order to whip up nationalist support from Somalis. Saleh noted that Yemen had provided food and clothing to the TFG President and Parliament Speaker after their successful negotiations in Aden earlier in the year, but "we are not sending anything now," he claimed.

¶5. (C) In Saleh's opinion, it is the Courts, not the TFG, who are receiving outside assistance. Egypt's intelligence services, he asserted, were supporting the Courts on the ground "not as terrorists, but because they want war between Somalia and Ethiopia" in order to gain greater influence over the Ethiopia's use of the Nile. Likewise Libya's Qadafi was sending support to the Courts' Chairman through former Somali President Abdul Qasam Salad because Qadafi is "not on good terms" with Ethiopia and because he wants to "create trouble for U.S. forces in the Horn of Africa" (NFI).

¶6. (C) Seizing upon the presence in the meeting of RDML Richard Hunt, Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF HOA), Saleh said Yemen was "suffering from Somalia's problems," particularly because of the daily flow refugees into Yemen. "We have more than 150,000 Somalis here," he claimed, "and we are concerned about them not only for humanitarian reasons but also because we have caught

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smugglers bringing weapons here, possibly for terrorist attacks." Saleh pleaded with Hunt to "stop the refugees from getting closer to our shores." GEN Abizaid and RDML Hunt said that through better coordination between the Yemeni Coast Guard, CTF-150, and NAVCENT, more could be done to combat smuggling of people and weapons between Somalia and Yemen.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Saleh is clearly concerned about the Islamic Courts' military successes in Somalia (reftel). As one of the few regional actors with access to all of Somalia's regional and factional leaders, Saleh is keen to use his influence to moderate the Islamic Courts. That said, Saleh's tone in this meeting indicated that he believes it may be too late to exert meaningful influence over the Courts as they gain military and political strength on the ground. As for Saleh's refutation of arms shipments to the TFG, post has nothing thus far to confirm or discredit these reports, but we note that Saleh has in the past defied the UN arms embargo to send arms to the TFG.

¶8. (U) GEN Abizaid has cleared this message.
Krajeski